

Family Connections

Volume 7, Issue 1 ~ 2008

In This Issue:

Foster Care & Adoption Advisory Board

--Page 2

Children's Division News

--Page 4

Scholarships & Taxes

--Page 6

"Facilitated Openess..."

--Page 8

And Much More ...

**If you no longer wish to
receive this publication,
please make your request in
writing to:**

FACC - Heather Henke
111 North 7th Street, Suite 402
St. Louis, MO 63101

Request by e-mail at:

heatherhenke@foster-
adopt.org.

Request by telephone

toll-free at: 800-FOSTER-3.

"Family Connections" is edited and published by:

Department of Social Services •
Children's Division • 615 Howerton
Court • P.O. Box 88 • Jefferson City,
Missouri 65103 • www.dss.mo.gov

In conjunction with:

Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition •
111 North 7th Street, Suite 402 •
St. Louis, Missouri 63101 • 800-
FOSTER-3 • www.foster-adopt.org

Tax Time



The Adoption Tax Credit is a valuable benefit for adopting families. However, with the details of how it works, acceptable expenses, who qualifies, and other "small print" items make it difficult for most families to understand. With the help of NACAC, we have included in this issue helpful information to help sort out those frequently asked questions, or where you can get them answered.

Missouri Tax Credit

As part of Missouri's enacted legislation, HB 1453, \$2 million in adoption tax credits are set aside for adoption of children who are wards of the state. You may even be able to claim the credit for adoptions that occurred in previous years.

Before proceeding, let's review what a tax credit is. According to IRS Publication 968, "The adoption credit is the amount that you subtract from your tax liability." The following summarizes the information on the Missouri Department of Revenue website, <http://dor.mo.gov/tax/taxcredit/atc.htm>.

Purpose: Provides a credit to assist in the nonrecurring adoption expenses for a special needs child.

Eligible Applicants: Any person residing in this state that legally adopts a special needs child is eligible to receive a tax credit up to \$10,000 for nonrecurring adoption expenses for each child.

Eligible Activities: The child must be a special needs child as determined by the Children's Division, a child-placing agency licensed by the state, or by a court of competent jurisdiction.

How the Program Works: To claim the Adoption Tax Credit, the parent, or their employer if the employer is claiming the full credit, must complete Form MO-ATC. The claimant must attach a copy of the completed Form MO-ATC along with the tax return the first year the credit is being claimed. Effective January 1, 2000, up to 50 percent of any tax credits earned for adoptions finalized after January 1, 2000, may be claimed upon placement of the child and the remaining 50 percent claimed after the special needs adoption is final.

Eligible Use of Tax Credit: The credit may be carried forward four subsequent years. During the year of adoption, or any year in which the credit is carried forward, the credit will be reduced by the state's cost of providing care, treatment, maintenance, and services when the child is placed, with no intent to return to the adoptive home, in foster care or residential treatment licensed or operated by the Department of Social Services, Children's Division, the Division of Youth Services, or the Department of Mental Health, or when a juvenile court temporarily or finally relieves the adoptive parents of custody of the child.

For more information or questions, visit <http://dor.mo.gov/tax/taxcredit/atc.htm>, or contact Missouri Department of Revenue, Division of Taxation and Collection at 573.522.2089, or taxcredit@dor.mo.gov.

Foster Care & Adoption Advisory Board

Below are the representatives from each area that serve on the State Foster Care & Adoption Advisory Board.

Area 1—Northwest Region

Rep 1: VACANT *

Rep 2: Shannon Wassam; 660-343-3681;
wassam@earthlink.net

Area 2—Northeast Region

Rep 1: Diane Bueneman; 636-928-2198;
fisherofthelake@yahoo.com

Rep 2: Cindy Crowell; 636-239-0488;
sevendcrowell@yahoo.com

Area 3—Southeast Region

Rep 1: Zenita Smith; 573-624-4657;
dxsmiths@blazingisp.net

Rep 2: Kathryn Byington; 573-358-3736;
ronbyington@charter.net

Area 4—Southwest Region

Rep 1: Pat Rogers; 417-532-7933;
patrogers76@hotmail.com

Rep 2: Eric Pilson; 417-779-9161;
epilson@centurytel.net

Area 5—Kansas City

Rep 1: Lois McDonald; 816-833-0785;
LMcDLNC@aol.com

Rep 2: Janet Richardson; 816-796-4497;
jnrichardson@sbcglobal.net

Area 6—St. Louis City

Rep 1: VACANT *

Rep 2: VACANT *

Area 7—St. Louis County

Rep 1: VACANT *

Rep 2: VACANT *

Foster Parent Associations:

Missouri Foster Care & Adoption Association Jim McKenna; 417-538-4362; mfcaastatepres@centurytel.net

Midwest Foster Care & Adoption Association Lori Ross; 816-686-0463;
rross600@aol.com

Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition

Denise Kelley; 800-FOSTER-3;
denisekelley@foster-adopt.org

* **Contact Diane Bueneman (Area 2) to find out how you can fill a vacancy.**

What Happened at September's Board Meeting?

Tom Quinn in the School Governance Section with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was the Board's guest speaker in September. Mr. Quinn provided the Board with information on DESE's functions and allowed time for board members to ask questions and share concerns. Below are some common issues and information provided by Mr. Quinn to resolve them.

o**Birth Certificate Required for Registration:** For children in foster care, Mr. Quinn stated not having a birth certificate should never be a reason that a school does not enroll a child.

o**Immunizations Required for Registration:** There is 30-day window allowed for immunizations, therefore it should not be an issue at time of enrollment. If receiving a series of boosters, a school can mark those immunizations as "in progress."

o**Transportation for foster children to remain in "home school":** DESE scripted out information to help school districts determine what funding can be used to find flexible funding to maintain home school of a child if possible.

o**Suspension:** Any suspension over ten days out of school is considered a change of placement and requires a Manifestation Hearing. For children with an IEP, the hearing also determines if the suspension is related to their behavioral or learning diagnosis. The school is required to provide services but they do not have to occur in-school.

o**Truancy:** A school can't suspend a child for missing school. If the child has a behavioral issue then it should be addressed as such.

o**Transferring Students:** The new school district should make assumptions that the child has the necessary information in their previous school's record. A transferring child should be allowed to enroll regardless of their record's immediate availability. The only way a school district cannot enroll a child at the time of registration is if they need time to determine if child is dangerous (five days are allowed). Kids with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) still have to be provided services during those five days.

o**Graduation Requirements:** The State Board of Education has minimum requirements for graduation. Some districts have credit recovery programs to assist students in re-cooping credits. Another possibility is looking at the GED Option program (new three year program)-- youth can take course work and when they pass the GED they obtain a High School Diploma. There are also some new virtual school programs called "Nova Net" or "MU High School." Additional information is found on DESE's website (www.dese.mo.gov).

Mr. Quinn noted that although some school district policy is supported by law, many procedures are not and have some flexibility.

If you would like the complete minutes from September's State Foster Care & Adoption Advisory Board, contact Diane Bueneman (Area 2).

Next meeting: January 8, 2008.

Calling all local foster/adopt parent support groups! We want to know what is going on in your local area. To include your county's "happenings" in the next newsletter, contact Heather Henke at 800-367-8373 or heatherhenke@foster-adopt.org.

Foster Care & Adoption Advisory Board

Local and state boards working for you

The Children's Division supports foster parents through the on-going work of the State Foster Care & Adoption Advisory Board. Each area/region of the state holds local meetings and works to resolve issues of their area foster/adopt parents. The state board consists of two parent representatives from each local board, and three foster parent associations representatives.

Goals of the Advisory Board:

Goal 1: To use available internal and external data to identify systemic needs, and develop plans to address those needs, using resources available within the agencies involved and the community as a whole.

Goal 2: To improve partnership between the Children's Division, other relevant state agencies, and foster parents through ongoing communication, input, and support.

Goal 3: To work together with the Children's Division to clarify policy and practices, provide feedback and recommendations regarding present and proposed policies related to child welfare.

Goal 4: Improve the Children's Division's communication with, and resource families' knowledge of, Children's Division policy.

Goal 5: To provide an opportunity for resource families, Children's Division staff, and the community to network and share resources.

Get Involved

Local Advisory Board:

Each local board operates within its own established bylaws. To find out more information about the work being done in your area, contact your parent representative or foster parent association listed on page two.

State Advisory Board:

Each area board is responsible for sending two parent representatives to the state meetings held quarterly in Jefferson City. Parent representatives are asked to make a two year service commitment to the state board. If you are interested in representing your area, contact your parent representative, listed on page two, to inquire about the process.



6th, 8th and 23rd Circuit Children's Division Offices Meet Accreditation Standards

The Children's Division announced in September that the 6th, 8th and 23rd Circuit offices of the Department of Social Services' Children's Division have met the standards for accreditation set forth by the Council on Accreditation (COA). The 6th Circuit covers Platte County, the 8th Circuit covers Ray and Carroll Counties and the 23rd Circuit covers Jefferson County. These three Circuits join the state's Central Administration, Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline, 4th, 11th, 18th, 21st, 23rd, 32nd, 33rd, 34th and 35th Circuits which have met accreditation standards since the on-site review process began.

"I want to congratulate staff in these three Circuits for their hard work and tremendous dedication to reach these national, best practice standards," said Paula Neese, Children's Division Director. "The 6th, 8th and 23rd Circuits join a growing list of offices that are setting a great example for the remaining Circuits in the Children's Division."

The COA is an international, independent, not-for-profit accrediting body that accredits behavioral health care and social service programs. Its rigorous accrediting process reviews all aspects of an organization and evaluates them based on national standards of best practices.

A panel of reviewers from various states found the 6th, 8th and 23rd Circuits to be in compliance with each of the major categories for the 832 standards with which an agency must comply to be accredited. The local offices had to meet service standards in adoption services, foster and kinship care services, child protection services and family-centered casework as well as organization and management standards in general areas such as ethical practice, financial management, behavioral management and organizational integrity.

Children's Division Director Paula Neese said, *"Each local jurisdiction will go through a similar process of strengthening their practices; the goal is for the entire system to be accredited. Accreditation is making us a stronger, more professional organization to meet the incredible demands placed on the child welfare system as we work with communities in the fight to protect Missouri's children. This is making us a stronger, better child welfare organization."*

Gov. Blunt Designates Mo HealthNet Oversight Committee



Gov. Matt Blunt called on Missourians with knowledge and expertise in the area of health care to serve on the Mo HealthNet Oversight Committee.

"Mo HealthNet is not just about reforming Missouri's safety net system for the poor but creating an entirely new system to deliver health care services to low income Missourians," Gov. Blunt said. "The old system was failing Missourians who needed help. Mo HealthNet will focus on health, wellness and prevention for our state's most vulnerable people. This committee will be tasked with advising the Department of Social Services on the implementation of the new Mo HealthNet program to help make certain we are doing everything possible to help serve the health care needs of participants."

Earlier this year Gov. Blunt delivered on his promise to create an innovative health care system by signing legislation creating Mo HealthNet. Mo HealthNet improves the taxpayer funded health care program by replacing the failing Medicaid system with one that improves health care for low income Missourians.

Mo HealthNet benefits include:

- Focus on prevention, health, and wellness
- Coordinated care and treatment
- Choice of a health care home which provides a central point of contact and assists with gaining access to needed care
- Personalized health plan
- Care based on proven practices

What Missourians can expect from Mo HealthNet:

- Better access to quality care
- Participants are actively involved in their health care
- Improved health care through technology
- Better health outcomes
- Expanded eligibility to include working Missourians with disabilities, **foster children until they are age 21**, and lower-income children in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)

NASAW Code of Ethics

The Children's Division recently added the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics to their website. The following broad ethical principles are based on social work's core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. These principles set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire.

Value: Service

Ethical Principle: Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.

Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest, as well as draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. They are also encouraged to volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no expectation of significant financial return (pro-bono service).

Value: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice. Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.

Value: Dignity and Worth of the Person

Ethical Principle: Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.

Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients' socially responsible self-determination. Social workers seek to enhance clients' capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. Social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients' interests and the broader society's interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession.

Value: Importance of Human Relationships

Ethical Principle: Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.

Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities.

Value: Integrity

Ethical Principle: Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner. Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.

Value: Competence

Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.asp>



Keep Current

Are you up-to-date on your Children's Division policies? The Children's Division posts all policy memos on the internet. Current and previous memos are found at: www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/memos.

Also available online is a Policy Manual. The manual is accessible by visiting: www.dss.mo.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/index.htm

Five Steps to Getting a Scholarship

By Marshall Loeb, MarketWatch

Follow these tips from Mark Kantrowitz, Director of Advanced Projects at FastWeb.com, for maximizing your chances of obtaining a college scholarship:

Apply to everything you can. "You can't win if you don't apply," says Kantrowitz. "If your odds of winning an individual scholarship are pretty small, the more you apply to the scholarships for which you qualify, the greater chance you have of winning. It usually doesn't take a lot of effort to apply to multiple scholarships; you can reuse essays. You'll find there's an awful lot of overlap in scholarship programs in terms of the questions they ask." So don't let fear or procrastination get the better of you -- send that application in.

Only apply to scholarships you're qualified for. Don't send out applications for ones that don't meet the basic criteria. "Most of these awards receive far more qualified applicants than they have awards available," adds Kantrowitz, so save yourself some time by reviewing the minimum requirements and making sure you are eligible.

In essays, always include concrete examples. "If you write something very abstract, like 'I'm a leader,' they're not going to take your word for it. They want to see a way in which you demonstrated your leadership ability."

Dress for success. "You wouldn't believe how many students go to an interview in T-shirts and jeans," says Kantrowitz. Wear a suit or other business attire, instead.

Make sure to get good letters of recommendation. If you ask a teacher or an adult you know to write you a letter of recommendation, "Many will write it even if they don't think you're the best person." So when you make the request, ask if they can write you a good letter. "They will probably give you an honest answer," says Kantrowitz. And make sure the person writing the letter can write well and is able to speak about what is relevant to the scholarship to which you are applying.

Fostering Adoption to Further Student Achievement Act

On September 27, President Bush signed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (HR 2669), which includes the Fostering Adoption to Further Student Achievement Act amendment—legislation that makes it possible for teens in foster care to be adopted without losing access to college financial aid. Under the new law, youth who are adopted after their 13th birthday will not have to include their parents' income when determining their eligibility for financial aid.

Tax Issues Related to Adoption

Adoptive parents often ask whether adoption assistance (adoption subsidy) payments are taxable. Many also wonder about claiming their child as a dependent and using the child tax credit. NACAC reviewed related IRS publications, and below we offer our interpretation of these issues. Please know that NACAC is not a tax expert, and these opinions should not be considered legal or financial advice. You should consult your own tax advisor before filing.

Adoption Assistance Payments as Taxable Income

Since 1974, the IRS has ruled that adoptive parents do not normally need to include adoption assistance benefits in their taxable income (see box below for specific IRS language).

However, the IRS also says that adoption assistance benefits may be taxable if they exceed the amount an adoptive family spends to support the child. This situation might occur if adoption assistance was a family's sole source of income. In cases such as this, some of the adoption assistance funds are used to meet the needs of the parent(s), so not all funds are being spent to support the child.

NACAC is not aware of any states that have a different definition of taxable income, but parents should consult their tax preparers or a tax advisor about state specific rules.

Scholarship Opportunities

www.collegeboard.org
www.fastweb.com
www.finaid.org
www.fafsa.ed.gov
www.NASFAB.org

www.savingforcollege.com
www.UNCF.org
www.orphan.org
www.jimcaseyyouth.org
www.getcollegefunds.org
www.fyi3.com/education/oregon.pdf
www.aasa.org/discover.htm

www.collegenet.com
www.waedfoundation.org/gs
www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.htm
mlwww.collegescholarships.com/
www.dss.mo.gov/cd/chafee/education.htm
www.questbridge.org
www.onwardandupwards.org

Accessing Adoption Tax Credits

The information below is not to be construed as legal advice. It is always advisable to consult a tax professional with individual questions.

Federal Tax Credit

Beginning in 2003, families adopting a child with special needs from foster care were able to access a federal adoption tax credit without needing to document expenses. For tax year 2007, the tax credit is \$11,390 per child and parents have this year and up to the next five years in which to claim the credit.

How do I know if my child is considered to have special needs according to the IRS?

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) interprets the instructions for Form 8839 (the Adoption Tax Credit form) this way: If you receive adoption subsidy (assistance) for your child, the state that provides the subsidy has determined that your child has special needs. Your adoption subsidy agreement (or application and agreement) is the evidence that the state has determined your child to have special needs. These instructions can be found at:

www.irs.gov/instructions/i8839/ch02.html#d0e284

A child is a child with special needs if all three of the following statements are true:

The child was a citizen or resident of the United States or its possessions at the time the adoption process began. A state (including the District of Columbia) has determined that the child cannot or should not be returned to his or her parents' home.

The state has determined that the child will not be adopted unless assistance is provided to the adoptive parents. Factors used by states to make this determination include:

- A.** The child's ethnic background and age,
- B.** Whether the child is a member of a minority or sibling group, and
- C.** Whether the child has a medical condition or a physical, mental, or emotional handicap.

If you check the box in column (d), indicating the child has special needs, be sure to keep evidence of the state's determination in your records.

More Tax Questions?:

Visit www.nacac.org/postadopt/taxcredit, or contact the NACAC at 651.644.3036 or e-mail concerns to: adoption.assistance@nacac.org.

Don't forget . . .

Tax Time is also the time to complete the Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) and other applications for students who are continuing their education.

Students should complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1, 2008 as possible. Some of the applications for scholarships and vouchers require the FAFSA to be completed.

NOTE: This includes the application for Chafee Education & Training vouchers. Visit www.dss.mo.gov/cd/chafee/education.htm for more information.

In addition, the FAFSA considers students for grants and work study programs on a first-come, first-served basis.

Visit www.fafsa.ed.gov for more information or to fill out the form electronically.



A Guide to Assist in Mental Health needs of Children in Foster Care

Working with psychiatrists and understanding psychotropic medications can be complicated. In an effort to help child welfare professionals and foster/adopt parents better understand these aspects of child mental health, the Center for Mental Health Services Research partnered with the Children's Division to develop an educational guide. "Working with Psychiatrists and Psychotropic Medications for Children in the Child Welfare System: A Guide for Child Welfare Professionals, Judges, Lawyers, Foster Parents, and Family Members" can be found on-line:

<http://gwbweb.wustl.edu/cmhsr/psychotropic/index.htm>

Please note, the above link is a corrected web address from the previous newsletter. Sorry for any inconvenience.

Facilitated Openness Can Benefit Children Adopted from Care

*From Spring 2007 Adoptalk, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children
970 Raymond Ave, Ste. 106 St. Paul, MN 55114; 651.644.3036; www.nacac.org. By Diane Riggs, NACAC staff*

When my parents adopted in the early '60s, society accepted adoption, but it was not something most adoptive parents (whose infants were matched with the family by skin, eye, and hair color) shared publicly. Today, parents who adopt children from foster care cannot pretend their children were always a part of the family, and most know that becoming a legal part of a new family does not erase a foster child's emotional ties to the past. As openness in infant adoption gains currency, it is worth considering how safe, facilitated contact with birth family members can benefit children adopted from care.

Why Promote Contact?

Helping a foster or adopted child stay in contact with members of his or her birth family can be time-consuming and sometimes emotionally draining. Facilitated contact, however, can be valuable for children in the following ways

The promise of birth family contact can help some youth commit to adoption. A recently published adolescent adoption study [1] found that before they would accept an adoption plan, "adolescents needed to be told early that adoption would not preclude contact with their birth families." Youth also needed to clearly understand why they could not return to their birth parents, and why other family members could not assume custody. Once she realized her birth parents "weren't going to be there" for her, one youth in the study realized she belonged with her adoptive family.

Contact with birth family members and past caregivers can ease the transition to adoption.

As Nancy Umbach, an adoptive parent and professional in Ontario, asserts, "It is hard for kids to move on when they're still worrying about whether their birth family is okay or not." Fortunately a new provincial law, effective December 2006, allows foster children to be adopted and, when it serves their best interests, have contact with members of their birth family, previous caregivers, or members of their band or native community. Prior to the change, any foster children whose birth families were granted the right to visit them could not be adopted. Prior foster families or birth family members can even aid the transition to adoption by assuring the child that they love him and that being adopted is okay. These important people need to let the child know they do not view the change as an act of disloyalty, but as an opportunity to be embraced.

By promoting contact with important figures from children's past, adoptive parents can show respect for their children.

Showing respect for a child's birth family (and, by extension, the child) is important. When children feel respected and know that their adoptive parents are not trying to sever ties to their past, they are better able to open up about their experiences, and start healing old wounds. As one parent in the adolescent adoption study affirmed, "I'm not sure adolescent adoptions can succeed if the adoptive family is



not willing to be, at least, open to some contact with the birth family."

Helping children face family realities is better than allowing children to fantasize about the unknown.

Faulty fantasies can grow when facts are absent. Realities, though they may be tough to handle, can be addressed and integrated into a child's understanding of him or herself. Barb Fischer, a child welfare trainer and foster, kinship, and adoptive parent, puts it this way, "My preference is that my kids are able to know the answers to some of their questions and are allowed to start adjusting to some of their truths while they are still young, instead of [being forced to] go through it all at once when they are adults."

Keeping in touch can ease worries and promote the exchange of information.

Even if a child's birth parents are out of the picture, other members of the family or previous foster families may wonder and worry about the child. Contact with them can allow the child to see that other people still remember and care about him or her. Relatives and former foster families can also address the child's anxieties, help fill gaps in their history, and offer adoptive parents insight about past experiences.

Contact can help youth reconcile more pieces of their identity.

Questions of identity, particularly for teens adopted from foster care, can be

Community Forum

deeply troubling. They were not born to their adoptive parents, so are they destined to replicate the misstep their birth parents may have made? Birth family members, neighbors, or past foster families may be able to address these concerns and share aspects of the family's history, talents, accomplishments, stories - all which are easier for the youth to own.

Post-adoption contact can help birth family members accept and support the adoption. In her study of parents who lost children to adoption, [2] Elisabeth Neil found that birth parents, burdened with feelings of shame and guilt, often required a great deal of emotional support. However, when adoptive parents initiated contact, indicated that the birth parents had value, and empathetically met with them face-to-face, adoption acceptance among birth parents rose substantially. As a result, they were able to be much more positive forces in their children's lives.

Facilitating Contact

When considering contact, adoptive parents must put their children's well-being first, and never force contact if the children are unwilling. With each interaction between her children and people from their past, Barb Fischer asks herself, "Whose best interest is served here?" The answer, says Barb, "has to be my child."

Whether they know the birth family or not, adoptive parents should work with the placing agency to make certain they receive copies of all the information from the child's file. Elements of the file can be incorporated into a lifebook for the child. The file might also include details about other members of the child's

birth family or previous foster families.

Cheryle Roberts, program director for Lilliput Children's Services in California, suggests that workers might be able to moderate a pre-adoption meeting where foster/adoptive parents and birth relatives can share information and pictures of the child. The worker could even take a picture of the birth and adoptive parents together. "What better way is there to make a child feel comfortable with the adoption than having a picture of his birth and adoptive families together in his lifebook?" asks Cheryle.

When considering contact resources, adoptive parents should cast a wide net. Parents and teens in the adolescent adoption study included the following as family: birth parents, step-parents, siblings, past foster siblings, godparents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other previous caregivers. Since sibling loss is often felt most acutely, it is not surprising that 73 percent of study families were in contact with siblings.

Promoting Safety

Lilliput Children's Services, reports Cheryle, likes to "promote openness as a continuum from no contact at all to open regular contact." Most families, she says, fall somewhere in the middle. After deciding upon contact, families must set parameters around the amount and kind of contact, the degree of supervision needed, and strategies for avoiding uncomfortable situations. Parents must also be prepared to help their children through any acting out that can result from contact. If any contact becomes negative, parents should limit or stop it.

To help prevent problems, adoptive parents should instruct youth how to assess danger, extricate themselves from unhealthy situations, and address uncomfortable questions. One youth in the adolescent adoption study whose birth mother makes him feel guilty has a pat response: "I tell her that I love her and that there is a place in my heart for her, but I have moved on." Another youth reports, "I call my mom if I feel uncomfortable, and she will be right there." Just knowing her parents would not sanction contact with a drug-addicted uncle helped another youth leave her grandparents' house after her uncle showed up.

Although it can be difficult for adoptive parents to reach out to their child's first family, many former foster children know and may someday seek out members of their birth family. When it is safe to do so, adoptive parents can help their children explore the past, and prepare for the future, by making or maintaining connections with birth families and former caregivers. These connections can help children and youth gain a better sense of who they are and more readily accept their place in the adoptive family.

[1] Lois Wright, Cynthia C. Flynn, and Wendy Welch, "Adolescent Adoption and the Birth Family," *Journal of Public Child Welfare* 1, no. 1 (2007): 35-63.

[2] Elisabeth Neil, "Coming to Terms with the Loss of a Child: The Feelings of Birth Parents and Grandparents about Adoption and Post-Adoption Contact," *Adoption Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2006): 1-23.

If you would like to comment on this featured Community Forum piece, please contact Heather Henke at: heatherhenke@foster-adopt.org.

NEW Supports for Adoption Families: Adoption Resource Centers

Great news for Missouri's adoptive families: This fall, the Children's Division contracted for two Adoption Resource Centers (ARCs). ARCs provide additional resources for adoptive families, including respite care, support groups for older youth, educational advocacy, and crisis intervention services.

In developing the ARCs, the Children's Division partnered with two of Missouri's foster/adoptive parent organizations. The Eastern Missouri Adoption Resource Center is now a program of the **Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition (800-FOSTER-3)** and The Western Missouri Adoption Resource Center is now a program of the **Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association (816-350-0215)**.

How did this happen? For years, the Children's Division and Missouri's foster/adoptive parent organizations have heard from adoptive parents that additional supports are desperately needed. About a year ago, a survey was conducted, which provided enlightening information.

What Adoptive Parents Had to Say:

Adoptive parents enter a lifelong commitment knowing that their children will likely have special needs. However, 47% of families reported that their children's needs exceeded their expectations. There were 49% of parents who stated having a child with at least one mental or emotional disorder, including:

- o 50% ADHD
- o 12% Bipolar Disorder
- o 10% Oppositional Defiance Disorder
- o 8% Attachment Disorder
- o 7% Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- o 6% Depression

In addition, 41% of families have children with developmental concerns, while 33% have a child who is not performing at their grade level (behind by 1-5 years).

Addressing Parents' Needs:

Different families have different needs, but overall, adoptive parents reported that their top needs are:

- o Tutoring (37%)
- o Family therapy (35%)
- o Educational advocacy (28%)
- o Support groups for youth (28%)
- o Respite care (25%)
- o Crisis Counseling (22%)

Adoption Resource Centers will help fill some of the service gaps. To date, ARCs are already carrying out

indispensable work:

Respite Care

Nearly 200 children participated in the previous Parents Night Out in the Eastern area, and 20 families are already signed up for the next Parent-to-Parent Respite Network. There have been 27 interested respite providers located who will start the process in the Western area within the next 30 days. In addition, 30 adoption friendly churches have been located for respite recruitment and group options.

Youth Support Groups

So far, three groups have been held in Eastern Missouri:

- o *Adoption: Keeping it real* - Discussing the reality of what it means to be adopted and the long and short term implications.
- o *Mommas and Poppas: the Perception of Parenting* - Discussing the unspoken expectations of parents from their adopted children.
- o *A whole new world*- Settling in with a strange new adopted family.

Youth reported that the support groups help them feel connected to other youth, and that the groups help improve their coping skills.

In the Western area, one round of support groups has been completed for newly adopted kids regarding family claiming with several other groups in the works.

Educational Advocacy

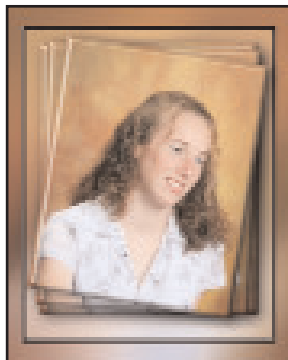
In the Eastern area, fifteen families have received one-on-one consultations regarding:

- o IEP development and implementation,
- o Information about autism,
- o Guidance for placement in new school,
- o Evaluation process for special education, and
- o Tutoring

Ten families in Western Missouri have received training and consultation on the same issues, plus eight foster families have been recruited to train and assist families as well. Additionally, 57 adoptive families have received one-on-one crisis support and advocacy services to maintain placements of children in their home and to access needed services.

Are you an adoptive parent that needs additional support services? If so, please contact the Eastern Missouri Adoption Resource Center at (800-FOSTER-3) or the Western Missouri Adoption Resource Center at (816-350-0215).

Featured Children



Meet Nikki

A Teen with a Passion for the Outdoors

A true girl scout, Nikki is as happy playing cowboys and Indians as she is trying to rescue a squirrel out of the swimming pool. In addition to squirrels, Nikki has a love for horses and cats and would like to work with animals when she grows up. Nikki describes herself as smart, energetic, strong willed, caring, creative, talkative, a hard worker and spiritual. Nikki is in good physical health. She makes excellent to above average grades in school and she says math is her favorite subject.

Nikki is the oldest of five children, and will not be placed with her siblings, however, her family should be willing to explore continued contact with her siblings. Nikki is ready to take bigger steps toward independence and would like a family who will encourage her to grow and mature. She is very social and enjoys family life that includes lots of friends. Nikki would be considered a legal risk placement. *If you would like to learn more about Nikki, contact Sue Tucker, Webster County Children's Division, at 417.859.2208.*

Meet Samantha

An Enthusiastic Teen who Likes Rascal Flatts and Sheryl Crow

With a rare enthusiasm for life, Samantha brings energy where ever she goes. Samantha couldn't narrow down her "favorite" things because she is interested in everything. Samantha spends her free time crafting, playing with beads, making paint by number projects or tumbling and dancing outside. She views herself as energetic, strong willed, a good listener and fun.

Samantha is in good physical health. She makes excellent to above average grades in school. She likes all subjects with equal enthusiasm, but says math and spelling are the hardest. Samantha's foster mother says that Samantha responds best to lots of verbal praise and prefers this positive reinforcement over rewards and privileges. *If you would like to learn more about Nikki, contact Sue Tucker, Webster County Children's Division, at 417-859-2208.*



Meet Corvat and Corvast

Two Adorable 11-Year Old Twin Boys Enjoy Being Together

Corvat and Corvast, currently not in the same foster home, very much want to be adopted together. Both brothers just recently started wearing glasses, and even though they admit that the glasses help them see better, like any typical child, they still do not like to wear them. Corvat and Corvast are good students and love to learn new things, play sports and video games. They are described as very bright, creative, and well-mannered children who are big helpers around the house... doing chores without even being asked!

Corvat has a wonderful gift of writing raps and stories where his brother loves to cook!

Both boys need a structured home environment that has caring, loving, supportive, and patient family members.

Please contact Amber Warren, Missouri Alliance for Children and Families, at 314-991-1737 ext. 250 for more information on adopting Corvat and Corvast.

Family Connections

c/o FACC

111 North 7th Street, Suite 402

St. Louis, MO 63101